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SUBJECT: WMD COMMISSION'S MEETING WITH RUSSIAN
COUNTERTERRORISM COORDINATOR SAFONOV

Classified By: Political M/C Alice Wells for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: The Commission on the Prevention of WMD Proliferation and Terrorism (WMD Commission), chaired by former Senator Bob Graham, met with Russian Special Envoy on Counterterrorism Anatoliy Safonov September 25. The Commissioners focused their questions on bioterrorism and the security of Russian nuclear material stockpiles. Although Safonov acknowledged that the U.S. and Russia held different views about the severity of the bioterrorism threat, he lauded bilateral cooperation on nuclear material safety and security. Safonov also stressed the necessity of U.S.-Russian engagement on various counterterrorism challenges in spite of the current political climate, particularly on threats emanating from Pakistan, and expressed his appreciation for his close cooperation with U.S. Counterterrorism Coordinator Dailey. End Summary.

¶2. (C) On September 25, the WMD Commission discussed U.S.-Russian cooperation on various WMD proliferation and terrorism challenges with Russian Special Counterterrorism Envoy Anatoliy Safonov. Former Senator Bob Graham, who chairs the Commission, asked for Safonov's assessment of the bioterrorist threat and U.S.-Russian collaboration on preventing bioterrorist attacks. Safonov admitted that the U.S. and Russia have divergent assessments of the severity of the threat. In a particularly telling exchange on the anthrax scare, he claimed, "no one is familiar with the biology of 'white powder,'" and wondered why the U.S. spent \$20 million on decontaminating Congressional halls from anthrax. Safonov then asserted that three to five new biological pathogens are discovered in nature every year, and old pathogens continuously mutate into new strains. It was unclear whether Safonov considered it futile to focus efforts on combating these threats or simply unnecessary, but he emphasized that Russia did not consider it a priority. Nevertheless, he hoped that Russia and the U.S. could take "small steps" on bioterrorism cooperation at a potential CTWG subgroup meeting in December.

¶3. (C) In response to Commissioners' questions on the nuclear proliferation threat in Russia, Safonov stated that Russia has taken great strides since the 1990s, when they considered the threat to be much more serious than at present. He also highlighted U.S. assistance in maintaining nuclear safety and security in Russia, pointing to a U.S.-Russian program in Krasnoyarsk to stop and decommission reactors that produce weapons-grade plutonium. Safonov alleged that only one plutonium reactor remained active. Although the U.S. stopped funding the program this year, Safonov claimed Russia would abide by its commitments and decommission the reactor on schedule. Regarding the physical protection of nuclear facilities, he stated that Russia has held five to ten exercises on securing facilities in recent years, and many have been attended by international observers. He half-jokingly added that Russian nuclear facilities were safe, because U.S. experts were obliged to ask their Russian counterparts how to improve protection every time they met.

14. (C) Safonov lamented a lack of trust between the U.S. and Russia, claiming it was one of the bigger impediments to advancing bilateral counterterrorism cooperation. On the other hand, he emphasized the need to maintain ties on WMD issues, regardless of the political climate and the overall state of bilateral relations. He indirectly referenced the U.S.' withdrawal of the 123 Agreement, stating that "in the background of recent events, the U.S. decided to reduce cooperation on some nuclear projects, and while we suppose this does not help, it is also not an impediment to our cooperation." Safonov hoped that the U.S. and Russia might expand cooperation on Pakistan, and mentioned that at a recent meeting with Ambassador Dailey he discussed the need to work together on the threats posed by Pakistan's nuclear capabilities. He expressed gratitude for his working relationship with Ambassador Dailey, and called the U.S.-Russian Counterterrorism Working Group a "very productive forum."

15. (U) The Commission did not have an opportunity to clear this message.

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